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Reviewed by Henrik Williams

The Kensington runestone is perhaps the world's most famous runic monument, or rather its most infamous. Since its reported discovery in the autumn of 1898 on a property in Minnesota by Swedish-American farm-owner, Olof Öhman, it has been the subject of public scrutiny, particularly since the founding of a Runestone Museum in Alexandria, Minnesota, in 1958. Although the stone is by no means the only North American object bearing or thought to bear runes (see below), it is in many ways the most important.

It is nearly impossible to calculate how many books, articles and especially news stories have been published in the 122 years since the Kensington runestone was first made public, and interest shows no signs of abating. The latest TV productions about the runestone include a 2012 documentary by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) entitled *Schrödingers katt: Kensingtonsteinens gåte*, as well as several pseudo-scientific series devoted in part or whole to the runestone. The latest contribution is *The American Runestone* "starring" Peter Stormare, who is also the director of what seems to be a two-season production with twelve episodes (so far). Runologists have wisely declined to play any part in this pseudo-documentary.

Stormare's infotainment docudrama has met with little or no acclaim in serious media, but like its forerunner *Holy Grail in America* (2009) and the subsequent series *America Unearthed* (2012–), both mentioned by Krueger (pp. 153 f.), it has attracted millions of viewers in the United States and beyond. More fact-based programs have not enjoyed the same level of success, despite the work of sceptics such as Jason Colavito in debunking fringe science and revisionist history.

The Herculean task of cleaning the Augean stable of myths ascribed to putatively ancient artifacts has also been undertaken by David Krueger in the work reviewed here. I will concentrate in the following on the pieces of most interest to runologists and select only a few nuggets from the goldmine offered by the rest of the book.

Raised just outside Alexandria although currently based in Philadelphia, Krueger is striving against decades of misinformation on his home turf. His book has not discouraged hardcore ethnocentrists from using the Kensington runestone as their showpiece of White European origin, but nor does anything else seem likely to achieve such a goal.

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Myths of the Rune Stone: Viking Martyrs and the Birthplace of America delivers exactly what the title promises, describing how the phenomenon of the stone has been used and abused in various contexts ever since its first appearance. While most publications have focused on proving or disproving the authenticity of the inscription, a handful of authors prior to Krueger devoted their investigations to the culture surrounding the Kensington phenomenon. I will mention only three. Chris and Peter Susag's "Scandinavian Group Identity: The Kensington Runestone and the Ole Oppe Festival" (*Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 51 [2000]: 30–51) studies Kensington runestone culture from an ethnic angle. Larry J. Zimmerman's "Unusual or 'Extreme' Beliefs about the Past, Community Identity, and Dealing with the Fringe" (in *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendent Communities*, ed. C. Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T. J. Ferguson, 55–86 [Lanham, 2008]) has a very useful bibliography and discusses the matter of "Why People Believe Weird Things". Zimmerman also provides a balanced overview of attempts to authenticate scientifically the Kensington stone. Adam Hjortén ("Displaying a Controversy: The Kensington Rune Stone as Transnational Historical Culture", *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 62 [2011]: 78–105) concentrates on how the runestone has been exhibited in various contexts.

David Krueger himself is very well read on his topic, as attested by the 200 plus items in his bibliography, but he only includes English publications and refers to Scandinavian-language sources indirectly or not at all. This is the weakest aspect of his book.

Krueger approaches the runestone from a new angle. He has a doctorate in religion which allows him to dig deeper into the theological scope of the runestone, a previously underinvestigated topic. The result is most impressive, and I should state not only that this is one of the most valuable works on the Kensington runestone ever published but that I advise everyone with an interest in the topic to purchase a copy of their own. Runic scholars can learn a great deal about the role runestones and other rune-inscribed objects play in the public consciousness, affecting not only inauthentic monuments such as the Kensington stone, but also for example the Rök stone and other controversial runic memorials.

Krueger's book begins with an enormously entertaining description of the weeklong civic celebration in Alexandria of the six-hundredth anniversary of the purported carving of the runestone. Part of the celebration comprised a pageant with over fifty locals participating as Vikings and other characters in its story. The pageant closely resembled those described in publications by the Norwegian-American historical author Hjalmar Holand, who in 1908 took an interest in the stone and afterwards dedicated his life to promoting it and maintaining its authenticity. *Holand* was also given a star role in the pageant, one approaching that of a martyr to academic prejudice.

For those not familiar with the inscription on the Kensington stone, Holand's (last known) interpretation is given here (from his *A Pre-Columbian Crusade to America*, p. 36 [New York, 1962]):

[We are] 8 Goths and 22 Norwegians on [an] exploration voyage from Vinland through the west we had camp by [a lake with] 2 skerries one day's voyage north from this stone we were [out] and fished one day after we came home [we] found 10 men red with blood and dead. A[ve] M[aria] Save [us] from evil [we] have 10 men by the sea to look after our ships 14 day voyages from this island [in the] year [of our Lord] 1362.

Holand's narrative, and hence also the pageant's, sketches a story whereby the Swedish-Norwegian King Magnus Eriksson, "Defender of Christianity", ordered his subject Paul Knutson to search for the Norsemen of Greenland, who were missing after attacks by the Inuits. The Norse Greenlanders also needed to be re-Christianized after their lapse from the true faith. In this version of the story, the Norsemen had sought refuge in the West; Paul Knutson's expedition followed them, ending up in Minnesota. With no hostile natives in sight, some members of the expedition went fishing but on their return found ten of the company slaughtered, martyrs to their Christian missionary attempt. Holand also surmises that half of the remaining group stayed behind in Minnesota and intermarried with Andamans, explaining why these Native Americans had such light skin and were so "civilized".

The missionary theme was absent from Holand's original premise, which was nationalist in nature and concentrated on the "(re)discovery" of America by Scandinavians 140 years before Columbus and the adventurous "exploration" of a new continent and discovery of fresh natural resources as well as early conflict with the indigenous population. These themes, although still encountered in Kensington runestone propaganda, are today overshadowed by other ideas.

One of these is the importance of the Kensington phenomenon for the local economy, which is presumably also the reason that the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce acquired the stone from Holand in order to exhibit it. The Runestone Museum is still the main tourist attraction of that rather small community.

The Kensington stone has also been used to bolster the standing of Scandinavian immigrants in U.S. society. An unwelcome development in the runestone's history has been its use to suggest that people of Nordic extraction should be accorded a high status among the various social groups, and this reviewer has personal experience of Minnesotans of non-Scandinavian origin finding the chauvinism expressed by some adherents provocative. Nevertheless, the stone is gradually transitioning from being an ethnic icon to a symbol of community. Such local sentiment was already evident in the giant statue of "Big Ole", a wing-helmeted fiberglass Viking wielding a spear and shield who stands in the center of Alexandria. Originally made for the 1965 World's Fair in New York, the shield first bore the legend "MINNESOTA BIRTHPLACE OF AMERICA?"; it now reads "ALEXANDRIA BIRTHPLACE OF AMERICA", with the question mark conspicuously removed.

The third idea gaining precedence is the one Krueger explores most fully: that of the Kensington runic text as a sacred narrative. Although he offers much useful information throughout the book, it is the chapters on the stone's religious

use and abuse in which Krueger offers the deepest and most innovative insights. It is not only the specific connection to Christianity in both its Catholic and Protestant flavors that he investigates here; Krueger also stresses the importance of the stone's message as a civil and cultural religion. He writes (p. 10): "The devotion to the Kensington Rune Stone can be thought of as a local sect of American civil religion that fused national narratives with ethnic, racial, and regional concerns." This reviewer can only agree, having observed a miniature replica of the Kensington stone standing next to a picture of Jesus on a sort of home altar in the house of a deeply pious Christian of Swedish extraction. This has truly become a cult.

Krueger's first chapter is entitled "Westward from Vinland: An Immigrant Saga by Hjalmar Holand". In it, he provides (pp. 26–31) not only a background to Holand's life history and involvement with the runestone, but also an account of the scholarly world that he inhabited.

The Kensington stone in no way represented the first attempt to establish an early Scandinavian presence in America. The visits made by Leif Erikson and his compatriots around the year 1000 were well known from Icelandic sagas. But before the discovery in 1960 of the archaeological remains of a Viking Age habitation at L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland, there was no (actual) physical evidence of Norsemen on North American soil. The Icelandic accounts were doubted by some who preferred Christopher Columbus as the "discoverer" of America, although he never set foot on the continent itself.

The campaign for Nordic precedence was launched in earnest with Carl Christian Rafn's *Antiquitates Americanæ* (1837) and its supplement four years later. Rafn used the sagas as well as some inauthentic support in his attempt to prove Scandinavian primacy. He claimed that the Newport Tower was the remains of a Scandinavian church structure from no later than 1200 (*Supplement to the Antiquitates Americanæ*, ed. C. C. Rafn, [Hafniæ], 1841). Rafn's publication sparked wide interest and inspired Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous poem "The Skeleton in Armor".

A further claim with more relevance for runologists was made by Rafn about the runic nature of the inscriptions on Dighton Rock in Massachusetts. On the basis of drawings, he and Finnur Magnússon proposed the translation "One hundred and thirty-one men of the North have occupied this country with Thorfinn" (*The North American Review* 119 (no. 244) [1874]: 166–82, at 174).

My conjecture is that this is what sparked the idea that runic inscriptions, particularly runestones, could be located on American soil, and indeed many have since been identified. So far, I have come across over 100 objects bearing runes or rune-like marks in Canada and the United States (H. Williams, "North American Perspectives — Suggested Runic Monuments", *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. J. Glauser, P. Hermann, and S. A. Mitchell, 876–84 [Berlin and Boston, 2019]). Although many of these are not runic at all and no runic ones seem to be older than the late 1800s, one cannot

escape the conclusion that the runic frenzy in America was sparked by the leading Scandinavian runologist of his time.

Rafn's lead was followed by University of Wisconsin Professor of Scandinavian languages Rasmus B. Anderson in his 1874 book *America Not Discovered by Columbus*. As Krueger demonstrates, this work was fundamental in building the Scandinavian-American "homemaking myths". He writes (p. 19):

[Anderson] portrayed the Norsemen as preparing the way for the pilgrims by bringing Christianity to the Indians and argued that Leif Eriksson's brother Thorwald died at the hands of the Indians in a self-sacrificial attempt to settle Cape Cod. . . . Anderson appealed to the American elite by arguing that Scandinavians were the source of America's democratic ideals.

Anderson claimed that these democratic ideals were brought to Normandy by the Norsemen, that William the Conqueror transported them to England, and that the Massachusetts pilgrims came from the English Danelaw. Born in Norway, Anderson argued that Anglo-Saxon Americans and Norwegian-American shared common roots.

A similar idea about America's democratic heritage had already been promulgated by Thomas Jefferson, but in his case it was the Anglo-Saxon invaders who were stated to have brought the system of government that ultimately reached America (A. J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition*, 15 f. [New Brunswick and London, 1990]).

It is also interesting to note that the Greenlanders of Icelandic origin credited with the discovery of America have here been supplanted by Norwegians. While it is true that some of the explorers had roots in Norway, I think it unlikely that scholars would describe Leifr Eiríksson as Norwegian. Nonetheless, an American president did. I note that on the day before Leif Erikson Day, October 9, 2015, President Obama honored the eponymous Leif "as an important piece of our shared past with the Norwegian people" (B. Obama, "Presidential Proclamation — Leif Erikson Day, 2015"). The Icelandic *Leifr Eiríksson* has by this stage morphed into America's *Leif Erikson*.

The influence of Rasmus Anderson on later Scandinavian-American culture does not end there, as shown by Krueger. To runologists, the most noteworthy example of this would be the Anne Whitney statue of Leif Erikson in Boston, commissioned by Eben Norton Horsford who was a staunch supporter of the idea that Vinland was located in Massachusetts. With this in mind, it can nonetheless be observed that the inscription on the base is written not with short-twig runes in Old West Norse but with East Norse long-branch runes and in Runic Swedish, including the use of palatal *æ*.

Krueger (p. 25) also highlights the World's Columbian exposition held in Chicago as fertile ground for the motivation to create concrete evidence of Scandinavian presence in the United States. He also claims (p. 26) that "Swedish and Norwegian immigrants in the late nineteenth century were quite familiar

with rune stones and runic writing”, but as an unreferenced assertion and one of which I am dubious, this no doubt remains a question for future research.

Another important source of common knowledge about the Vinland voyages was the Norwegian (not Danish as stated by Krueger on p. 24) historian Gustav Storm's 1887 article “Studier over Vinlandsreiserne, Vinlands geografi og ethnografi” (*Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 2.2 [1887]: 293–372). Here (pp. 265 f.), Storm publicizes the letter of 28 October 1354 (known only from a post-medieval Danish version, see J. Knirk, review essay on “*The Kensington Runestone Vindicated*, by Rolf M. Nilsestuen; *The Kensington Rune-Stone, Authentic and Important: A Critical Edition*, by Robert A. Hall”, *Scandinavian Studies* 69.1 [1997]: 104–08) where, according to the traditional understanding (but see Knirk, p. 105), the Swedish-Norwegian King Magnus Eriksson via his regent Orm Østenson orders his subject Paul Knutson to visit Greenland.

Storm writes (p. 366):

Hensigten med Toget udtales at være ”at opretholde Kristendommen i Grønland”, altsaa en kamp mod Eskimoerne, men derfor kan naturligvis Planen ogsaa være at styrke Kolonien i sin Almindelighed, maaske ogsaa at undersøge de nye Lande. . . . Man kan saaledes ikke nægte Muligheden af, at ved disse Tider Beretninger om Markland, ja endog om de tidligere opdagede Lande, fra Norge kunde naa sydoover . . .

(The purpose of the tour is said to be “to uphold Christianity in Greenland”, that is a struggle against the Eskimos, but because of that the plan may also of course be to strengthen the colony in general, perhaps also to investigate the new countries. . . . One cannot therefore deny the possibility that at this time accounts of Markland, or even of the countries discovered earlier, could spread southwards from Norway . . .)

Not only was the letter issued too late for a voyage to be organized and embarked upon in the same year, but the following year was too stormy for trans-Atlantic travel, and Magnus's reign subsequently came to an end (E. Wahlgren *The Kensington Stone: A Mystery Solved*, 193 f. note 4 [Madison, 1958]). Nevertheless, it was high time for a trading vessel to set off for Greenland, and although there is no record of it ever having done so, much less returned, the Paul Knutson expedition should in my opinion not be entirely discredited. Its importance to the Kensington story is in any case fundamental, as it must have inspired whoever carved the stone.

The idea that Norsemen did travel from Greenland to America in most likelihood emanates from Storm. His meekly phrased “perhaps also to investigate the new countries” and especially his “countries discovered earlier” (including Vinland) in combination with the word *opdagede*, echoed by the **opdagelsefard** in the inscription, are significant indeed. This is most likely where the carver found his idea of an expedition from Norway to North America in the 1350s.

Although not stated explicitly, this same conclusion is implied only ten years after the stone was found. Helge Gjessing writes (in “Runestenen fra Kensington”, *Symra: En aarbog for norske paa begge sider af havet* 5 [1909]: 113–26, at 125):

Vi vilde da faa et temmelig bestemt holdepunkt for angivelsen av stenens virkelige alder. Jeg skulde være tilbøielig til at tro, tallet var valgt med hensigt, og at risteren var vel kjendt med de ovenfor anførte historiske forhold. Og mulig er det da, at indskriften skylder professor Storms arbeide sin tilblivelse — d. v. s., at den er yngre end 1887.

(We would then obtain a fairly definite point of reference indicating the real age of the stone. I would tend to believe that the number was deliberately chosen and that the carver was fully familiar with the historical circumstances outlined above. And then it is possible that the inscription owes its origin to Professor Storm's book — i.e. it is younger than 1887.)

Kruger's second chapter is entitled "Knutson's Last Stand: Fabricating the First White Martyrs of the American West" (pp. 41–67). He provides much valuable information on the relations between Minnesotan settlers and Native Americans in the late 1800s, linking this relationship with the purported massacre of the Norsemen centuries earlier. During the Dakota War of 1862, Native American warriors killed hundreds of settlers and soldiers. Krueger writes (p. 44): "In all likelihood, the traumatic events of 1862 inspired the creation of the Kensington Rune Stone inscription in the nineteenth century, and they influenced the stone's interpretation in the twentieth."

While I do not question the latter part of the claim, given Krueger's exposé of events following the war, I very much doubt that a runic forger, presumably in the 1890s, dated the Kensington runestone to 1362 to memorialize the 500-year-anniversary of the Dakota War. According to Krueger (p. 50):

In this potent civil religious milieu of paintings, memorials, monuments, gravestones, and memorabilia, it is easy to see how a Minnesotan could have been inspired to produce a memorial inscription that commemorated a primeval story of American sacrifice. Observers of the Kensington Rune Stone phenomenon have frequently noted the curious five-hundred-year gap between the dates on the stone's inscription (1362) and the year of Minnesota's "most dramatic event" (1862).

I believe that the explanation is a simpler one, and I am not the first to do so. Gustav Storm writes (p. 366 note):

Naar Knorren kom tilbage, oplyses ikke direkte: at det ikke var skeet i 1357, sees deraf, at den grønlandske Biskop Jon søgte og fik Bispestolen Hole og altsaa fremdeles var uvidende om, at hans Formand Arne var død i 1349 og saaledes han selv lovlig Biskop paa Grønland. Snarast skulde man tro, at Knorren kom tilbage i 1363 eller 1364, thi i det sidste Aar optræder Ivar Baardsøn i Norge ... og først i 1365 indvies en ny Biskop til Grønland.

(When the *knorr* [a Norse merchant ship] returned is not directly stated; it is evident that this had not occurred by 1357 since the Greenlandic bishop Jon applied for and was granted the bishopric of Hólar [on Iceland] and thus was unaware that his superior Arne had died in 1349 and that he himself was legally Bishop of Greenland. One would rather suppose that the *knorr* returned in 1363 or 1364, as in the latter year Ivar Baardsøn appeared in Norway ... and only in 1365 was a new bishop consecrated for Greenland.)

I note the years Storm suggests for the return of Paul Knutson's expedition. If this were as early as 1363, the presumed survivors must have left their base in Minnesota no later than the previous year to make the long journey home. This would mean 1362, the very year recorded in the runic inscription.

Hjalmar Holand was of the same mind. In one of the earliest of his many publications on the Kensington stone ("First Authoritative Investigation of 'Oldest Native Document in America'", *Journal of American History* 3 [1910]: 165–84 at 184), Holand writes:

But what of the ten men who were left in charge of the vessel down by the sea? No doubt they waited faithfully and anxiously for the return of their friends. But autumn followed summer, and winter passed away without the return of the explorers. At last, reluctantly, they weigh anchor in the summer of 1363, returning by way of Vinland and Greenland, arriving in Norway in the summer of 1364. This is not mere supposition, for an ancient Norse document tells us of the return of the remnant of the Paul Knutson expedition in the summer of 1364, which is another proof of their identity.

This quote from Holand (not in Krueger) demonstrates just how persuasive he could be. He wrote well, and typically in an engaging manner. Although more often wrong than right, he was no fool. He was also not averse to employing what may today be called "alternative facts", and one such falsehood is found in the quote above. There was never any document attesting to the return of the Paul Knutson expedition, only Storm's speculation as to when it occurred. And in his later books, Holand (silently) drops this particular claim.

I labor this point not from a need to dwell on the single semi-serious error I have encountered in Krueger's book but because I believe that one should not have exaggerated expectations of our Kensington author's literacy or library. While we may speculate about the motives underlying the carving of the runestone, we can hardly require the person or persons responsible to be widely read or experts on runes, linguistics or history.

In my opinion, the necessary pre-requisites for the runestone are limited to the following:

1. A Kensington-type set of runes.
2. A Scandinavian speaker of the dialect evidenced in the runic text.
3. An explanation of the appearance of non-contemporary words.
4. Information on the Paul Knutson expedition and its dates.
5. An account that was widely available and could provide a narrative model for the story-line of the tale told on the runestone.

The Larson runic alphabet from the 1880s proves the existence of a Kensington-type set of runes before the find in Minnesota (H. Williams, "The Kensington Runestone on Exhibition in Sweden", *Nytt om runer* 19 [2004, publ. 2006]: 35–36).

The dialect of the inscription has been identified as that of "a large part of the area called Nedansiljan (just south of lake Siljan) in Dalarna" or "the province of Härjedalen" (S. Fridell and M. G. Larsson, "The Dialect of the Kensington Stone",

Futhark 8 [2017, publ. 2019]: 163–66 at 165). A speaker of the latter dialect has been identified (Fridell and Larsson, p. 166).

The non-contemporary words such as **aptir** and **illu** were taken from a widely available book (Wahlgren 1958 [see above], pp. 134–37 and H. Williams, “The Kensington Runestone: Fact and Fiction”, *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 63.1 [2012]: 3–22 at 14).

The Paul Knutson expedition and its dates was taken from Storm, as discussed above.

The fifth and final pre-requisite, namely an account that could have provided the narrative frame for the runic text, has been identified as the tale of Thorvald Erikson’s exploits related in the Saga of the Greenlanders. This is, however, not widely known. It was remarked upon by Dr. Thorgunn Snædal, formerly the Chief Runologist of Sweden’s National Heritage Board, in a 2003 email to her colleague Prof. James E. Knirk, now-retired Head of the Runic Archives in Oslo. He shared the discovery during a presentation on 12 May 2017 at the annual conference of Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, in Minneapolis. David Krueger was present at this occasion which, however, took place two years after the publication of his book. I base the following account on Knirk’s presentation (with his consent).

The Saga of the Greenlanders tells the same basic tale as the Kensington stone. An updated translation of the runic inscription, with certain key words in bold, reads:

8 Götlanders and 22 Norwegians [= **30**] on (this?) **exploration** voyage from **Vinland westwards**(?). We had a camp by two **sheds**(?) one day’s **voyage** north from this stone. We went **fishing** one day. After we came home (we) found 10 men red from blood and dead. *Ave Maria*(?) may save from evil. There are 10 men by the sea to look after our **ships**, fourteen days’ journey from this **island**. Year 1362.

This may be compared with the saga’s account of Thorvald (according to a translation by A. M. Reeves, N. L. Beamish, and R. B. Anderson, *The Norse Discovery of America*, 206 [London etc., 1906]):

Now Thorvald made ready for this voyage with **30 men**, and took counsel thereon with Leif his brother. Then made they their ship ready, and put to sea, and nothing is told of their **voyage** until they came to Leif’s booths in **Vinland**. There they **laid up their ship**, and spent a pleasant winter, and **caught fish** for their support. But in the spring, said Thorvald, that they should make ready the ship, and that some of the men should take the ship’s long boat round the **western** part of the land, and **explore** there during the summer. To them appeared the land fair and woody, and but a short distance between the wood and the sea, and white sands; there were many islands, and much shallow water. They found neither dwellings of men nor beasts, except upon an **island**, to the **westward**, where they found a **corn-shed** of wood, but many works of men they found not; and they then went back and came to Leif’s booths in the autumn. . . .

Somewhat later (p. 207 f.) the members of the expedition fight against the natives and Thorvald is killed but before dying he tells his companions to “set up crosses at my head and feet, and call the place Krossaness for ever in all time to come” (p. 208).

This translation postdates the finding of the Kensington stone but the story itself was known long before, not least from Rafn's *Antiquitates Americanæ* (1837, pp. 40–46). There are obviously striking resemblances between this story and the one in the inscription, including the **30 men**, the mention of **Vinland, westwards**, a **ship**, a **voyage**, **fishing** and **exploration**, as well as an **island** and a **shed**. While the killing of ten men and the prayer(s) have no exact correspondence (rather the Norsemen kill the natives), Thorvald is nonetheless killed and crosses are raised for him. It is more than plausible that this is the narrative that inspired the author(s) of the runestone text, who probably knew the saga through reading a translation into modern Scandinavian (or possibly English).

The rest of Krueger's book makes fascinating reading and Chapter 3 (pp. 69–92) concentrates on the role of the Kensington stone in the local community. He ascribes it partly to small-town resentment of “the cultural elites of the East Coast” (p. 70). Promoting the stone becomes a sort of self-defence. Hjalmar Holand plays a major role in this process but commercial and ideological interests also provide solid local support. Not only clerics got involved, but also Masons and business leaders. The stone expanded from being a concern of only Scandinavian-Americans to include other ethnic groups and finally all Minnesotans, at least potentially. Krueger describes the different campaigns boosting the runestone, culminating in its exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C., in 1948–49 and the New York World's Fair in 1965. The latter marks the high point of the stone's wider attention (until recent decades).

Chapter 4 (pp. 93–117) describes the campaign by the church establishment to use the story of these putative first Christians, Roman Catholic Norsemen to boot, to make inroads among the almost exclusively Protestant Scandinavian immigrants. The AVM inscription was at the time interpreted as an abbreviation of *A[ve] V[irgo] M[aria]* which Archbishop John Ireland in 1909 declared to be “characteristically Catholic” (p. 102). The runestone was also understood to be a contributory factor in the lessening of aggression towards Catholic immigrants in Minnesota. A more offensive approach was adopted by Father James Michael Reard in 1952 when he identified the Kensington party as White missionaries and Catholic martyrs (p. 103 f.). While the attempt to turn Scandinavian-Americans into practising Catholics was evidently unsuccessful, the Kensington stone nevertheless served its purpose. In one section (pp. 106–09), Krueger details the charming story of the veneration of Our Lady of the Runestone. During a visit to the Catholic elementary school of Alexandria in 1957, Bishop Peter Bartholome “admonished his listeners to pray to Our Lady of the Runestone in times of difficulty and trial”. Our Lady of the Runestone Church in Kensington (located at 11 Runestone Drive) was dedicated in 1964.

In Chapter 5, “Immortal Rock: Cold War Religion, Centennials, and the Return of the Skraelings” (pp. 125–50), Krueger demonstrates how the growth in religious observance in the 1950s and 1960s was linked to political developments and how the Kensington stone was made to fit the idea of the “Birthplace of a Christian

Nation”, as well as how Erik Wahlgren’s 1958 monograph *The Kensington Stone: A Mystery Solved* constituted the first book-length counterattack in English on the authenticity of the inscription. Since Krueger does not rely on Scandinavian-language sources, he makes no mention of Sven B. F. Jansson’s “‘Runstenen’ från Kensington i Minnesota” (*Nordisk Tidskrift* 25 [1949]: 377–405). Surprisingly, not even Erik Moltke’s “The Kensington Stone” (*Antiquity* 25 [1951]: 87–93) makes the cut and neither scholar’s contribution in debunking the runestone’s putative authenticity is in fact even recognized.

Wahlgren’s book contained much useful information but unfortunately also made some unfounded claims and was written in a somewhat provocative manner for which he was heavily (and sometimes rudely) criticized. Nevertheless, it marked a turning point after which most scholars lost interest in the Kensington stone and more levelheaded members of the public no longer believed that it was medieval. They did not always care to voice that opinion in the presence of the true believers, however. The final part of Krueger’s book traces the history of the runestone’s culture until the present time.

David Krueger has written a tremendously interesting, useful and valuable book. He weaves his tale well and approaches the Kensington runic phenomenon from several new angles. For these reasons, I wholeheartedly recommend his impressive *Myths of the Rune Stone*. Few books combine sound scholarship with readability so well.